

7 P. 17-

H U N T I N G A N D F I S H I N G

Pernambuco is not by any means a hunter's paradise, though in primitive times it must have been very nearly so. There is still some sport to be had, however. In the years that I spent there my work kept me very close, and I seldom had on the same occasion both time and opportunity for hunting or fishing. I went hunting and fishing each perhaps half a dozen times during the whole period. But these few experiences, together with observations and conversations, gave me a general idea of the sporting possibilities of the country.

One important difference that one notices at once in the tropics is that there is no certain season for hunting. Not having our change of seasons, the animals have not such closely fixed breeding seasons. This makes it more difficult to set up a game conservation program. Actually, practically nothing had been done by the government toward setting up such a program up to the time that I left, though some forward looking people would like to see something done. And in the meantime, the wild life is being rapidly exterminated. With the increase in the number of hunters and improvement in the quality of dogs and firearms, and with the improved roads making an ever larger territory accessible to hunters, unless some control is devised we may expect to see the wild life diminished in a few years to a point where hunting will no longer be practicable.

The largest animals, the ema, or Brazilian ostrich, and the onça, or panther, are very rare, though they are sometimes met with in the sertão. I have heard people tell of seeing an ema in the road at night, running for miles ahead of a car or truck; but that was in the days before roads were improved, when cars could not rival the ema for speed. I have not heard of such a thing recently. I never saw an ema in the wild state, but have seen them in parks. They are noble birds, though not so large as the African variety. The jaguar is, I believe, practically unknown in Pernambuco now, but there is a red panther almost as large, which is considered an extremely dangerous animal. While seated in a barber shop one day I listened to the story of a hunt for such a panther, of the great size and ferocity of the beast, and of how

it was finally slain. I can not vouch for the accuracy of the details, but the universal awe with which the panther is regarded shows that it is no mean antagonist. One thing that surprised me was that the man stated that they ate the flesh of the panther, and he pronounced it excellent.

There is a small deer that is fairly common, a dainty, spike-horned creature, very slender and nimble. I doubt if a full grown one would attain seventy-five pounds in weight. They are hunted with dogs, the hunters lying in wait along the trail that the deer is expected to follow. This deer probably has a better chance of survival than any other large game animal of this section, as there is abundant cover, and shooting conditions are rather difficult. I have rarely seen these deer cross the road; but though seldom seen, people tell me that they are fairly plentiful.

There is a large rodent called a paca, with elongated body and very short legs, attaining a weight of twenty-five or thirty pounds. It lives in thickly wooded sections, and is hunted with dogs and guns; but as it knows well how to take advantage of cover it is difficult to get a shot. I have never seen a paca alive, but have eaten the flesh of one, and found it very good. Also there are two or three varieties of wild hog, one known as queixada, the other names escape my memory. People now in middle life tell me that in their youth these animals were so common that their flesh was an important source of food. Now they are practically unknown in the section where I lived, and rapidly disappearing from the state as a whole. There may still be a few of the once common capivara, the largest known rodent, to be found along the coastal rivers in isolated places, but they are extremely rare.

The tatú (armadillo) and tamandua (anteater) still give sport to nocturnal hunters. The tatú is often taken alive and kept in a box or other safe place, (it will dig out of any place that has not a secure floor) and fed on table scraps until suitably fat, or until a convenient time for eating. I regret that I left Brazil without ever eating a tatú. I never went hunting for them, but several times I had opportunity to buy one, but did not want to fool with it just at that time. I am told that when properly prepared it is considered a delicacy; but it must be something like the American opossum, for they say that unless you know just how to prepare it the meat is likely

to be very strong and greasy. There are several varieties of tatú, all of which have a hard bony shell, and the faculty of rolling themselves up, more or less; but there is one variety known as peba, I believe, that can make itself into so perfect a ball that it is proof against all effort of dogs' teeth. This defense of course renders it an easy prey to hunters, who simply pick it up and put it in a sack to carry it home. That is not the only defense however; the tatú generally, and the tamanduá always, seek to burrow in the earth, and are often able to escape in spite of the most valiant attempts of dogs, and even of men armed with tools, to get them out. Sometimes, however, the hunter can see that an underlying stratum of rock is so placed that the animal must dig in a certain direction, and digging ahead is able to capture the poor creature, just as it must be thinking that safety is practically assured.

There has been some very fine bird hunting in the past, and even now pretty good shooting may be had occasionally. There are three birds, the lambú pé, (the foot, that is the upstanding, lambú, so called because it is long legged) which is comparable to a pheasant, the cordóniz, which is similar to a grouse, and the lambú de pé roxo (purple footed lambú), somewhat like a quail. All these are fine game birds, and furnish good sport and good eating. They are, unfortunately, diminishing greatly in numbers. The country people still have, with rare exceptions, only antiquated muzzle loading guns, and no bird dogs; and the birds could seem to maintain themselves very well against such hunters, and against the depredations of foxes and other predatory animals, but now that hunters come from the cities with modern guns and good bird dogs the slaughter is too great. One hunter told me of killing more than eighty lambú pé in one day, about twenty years ago. Nowadays the hunter who gets more than ten or twelve shots in a days hunting feels that he has done very well indeed, always supposing that he has managed to score a reasonable number of his shots.

One may get a little duck shooting now and then on the lakes and ponds. There are some mallards, and other varieties that I did not recognize. And there are some migratory doves called originally aves de arribação (birds of arrival) now generally called simply arribação. They appear in vast numbers in a certain region, and while they are there of course the people try to get as many as possible. I have heard of

cases where a whole truck load of men drove a hundred miles or more to a place where they had heard that these birds had come, in order to spend a day shooting them. It is easy to shoot them, as they will sit in a tree, often in large numbers, and let hunters approach within range before flying. Often one may get three or four at a shot, sometimes even more. They are very good eating. Doubtless they will soon be exterminated, as were the wild pigeons that formerly existed in such great numbers in North America.

Rabbits are scarce, but there are a few; and there is a species of wild guinea-pig that is often found in rocky places, and becomes game for the not too ambitious hunter. And we must not overlook two edible lizards, one called tiu, and the other cameleão. The former is a ground running form, rather thick and stocky, and of a beaded appearance, black and yellow in color as a rule; while the latter is generally found in trees, has a high crest and a long tail, and changes color. I once shot one of these, while visiting at a fazenda in the sertão. It looked big to me, the total length being fully three feet, of which the greater part was the tail; but my hostess said that it was too small to be worth while cooking, so that I never got to try that sort of game. They are said to be very good.

Alligators are found in some of the streams and lakes, but seldom reach a size to be dangerous. Of course in the Amazon, and other large rivers, quite large ones are found, and stories are told of their attacking and devouring human beings. And there are many other animals that are encountered occasionally, but not in sufficient numbers to constitute proper game. I have a nicely tanned otter skin that was presented to me by one of my pupils, the animal having been killed on his father's plantation in Alagoas.

Pernambuco

Fishing is not highly developed as a sport in Pernambuco, but it is coming into vogue more and more, especially along the coast. In the interior, some people are beginning to take interest in stocking ponds and artificial lakes with good varieties of fish. The two game fish that I came to know are called carito and traira. The carito is somewhat similar to a crappie in size and appearance, except that it is darker in color. The traira may be compared with a black bass in size and general appearance, but is not of the same family, I believe. And it has two or three pairs

of very sharp teeth in the front of its mouth. The first traira I ever saw, some friend who had been fishing sent to us. I went in the kitchen and saw it lying on the table, apparently dead for hours. The servant said, "That's a traira fish; they'll bite you just like a snake." "I can easily believe that," I replied, "look at those teeth." And as I put my finger to the spot to examine them better, the fish, still alive as it chanced, gave a snap! and took off a piece of the end of my finger. Afterwards, when fishing for trairas, I was always very circumspect in the manner of taking the fish off the hook. Cut bait is generally used, either of meat or of fish, the latter being considered better, for either traira or carito; but they will occasionally bite worms, roaches, or almost any bait. I have never heard of anyone trying artificial bait on them, and I should like to see the experiment made. It might well be that they would take it. They bite voraciously, if at all, and a large one will put up a game fight when hooked.

Brazilians often fish with a circular net called a tarrafa, which is thrown in such a manner as to land spread out on the surface of the water, and the leads around the circumference take the net under, closing it at the same time. It is especially effective in muddy water. The cast is made by gathering up approximately one third of the circumference into the right hand, then holding another point in the left hand and yet another in the teeth, and releasing all together as the throw is made. If done properly, it lands nicely spread on the water. I could never make it fall a perfect circle, but made it spread fairly well, and actually caught a few fish with it.

Because of the teeth of the traira, it is customary to use a wire leader on the hook, or sometimes a fine steel wire is used for a line.

There is a large fresh water fish in Brazil called pirarucu, which, while native to the Amazon region, is being introduced experimentally in other Brazilian streams. It grows very large, attaining a weight of a hundred pounds or more. In its native habitat it is killed with a spear, but I think it possible that it might take a suitably designed artificial bait. There are some in the lake at Dois Irmãos park in Recife, and they would lunge fiercely at a Coca-Cola cap, or similar object dropped into the water near them, apparently taking it in the mouth and afterwards spitting

it out. It looks like it ought to be possible to get one hooked during that operation. It ought certainly to be a thrill to get a fish like that on a line.

Perhaps the most interesting fish of Pernambuco waters is the piranha -- that bloodthirsty little fish of which so many stories have been told. I was visiting once in the sertão, and expressed to my hosts the desire to take a bath. Of course this simple country house had no bathroom; but they suggested that I go to the river nearby, and a boy went with me, to show me a convenient place. I took soap and a towel, and at the lonely place to which the boy took me I undressed, and then remembering warnings I had had, I asked if there were no piranhas there. "No, of course not", the boy replied. I was still hesitant, and would not go in very deep, but I concluded my bath without interruption. That afternoon I asked my host, "Are there any piranhas around here?" "Oh yes," he replied, "plenty of them". I asked whether they could be caught with a hook, and he replied affirmatively; and when I expressed my desire to catch some, he promised to have the boys take me to a place where they might be caught. What was my surprise the following day, when they took me to the very same place where I had had my bath! The piranhas bit readily at the meat we used for bait, and we soon caught several. They are very much like perch in size and general appearance, but have powerful jaws, and two or three rows of teeth as sharp as razors. A good sized one could probably take from his victim at one bite almost a tablespoonful of flesh, which is a serious matter, especially if one is attacked by large numbers of them at one time. As to whether they are edible, I heard different reports; but the consensus of opinion was that while they might be used for food, the flesh is coarse and of a bad flavor. I did not feel encouraged to try them myself.

It seems that the piranhas are not always equally ferocious. In the rainy season, when the rivers are relatively high, and food fairly plentiful, there is not much danger in going into the waters, though even then one might be bitten occasionally. But in the dry season, when the river is reduced to a series of pools, they become exceedingly ferocious, attacking instantly any warm blooded creature that may chance to come into the water. Especially, it is said, when they perceive the scent, or taste, of fresh blood in the water, as when one fish just casually takes a sample from a

careless tourist, they become furious, and attack with the utmost violence. But I heard no stories of people actually having been killed by them in those waters.

A hunter told me of having shot a duck that fell into the water and was immediately devoured by piranhas before it could be retrieved, nothing remaining of it in a few minutes time except some feathers. Another story that somebody told me was of a horse that caught a fish. It seems the horse went to the pool to drink, and an ambitious piranha seized the end of the horse's nose; whereat the horse gave such a violent toss to his head that the fish was thrown completely out of the water, and fell on the bank behind the horse.

Even among the people who know how to be careful of them, someone is bitten now and then. They showed me a boy of eight or nine years, who had been bitten a year or so before that, while in the water with a group, seining for fish. The scar was fully three inches long and an inch wide, high up on the inside of the thigh, near the crotch. The Brazilians have a belief, or superstition, that the piranhas prefer to attack a man in his private parts. In the case of the little boy it left me wondering whether the location of the bite had any significance.